

PETER F. ALBA 1833 - 1915

by Yates Simonson

Peter F. Alba, affectionately known as the "Sage of Coden," was born in Pensacola, Florida on February 13, 1833. His grandfather, Don Pedro de Alba Lopez, emigrated from Spain and settled in Pensacola in the late 1700's. Don Pedro was born in Malaga, in the Kingdom of Granada in 1762. The family records of the Albas are well attested as far back as the middle 1500's.

John Alba, the father of Peter F. Alba, was prominent in civic and religious affairs and served as Mayor of Pensacola.

Peter spent his early years in Pensacola and received his education there. However, as a teenager, he was enrolled in Mobile's Spring Hill College. During this period, many Pensacola youths were sent to Mobile to school because of the educational advantages offered there.

College life was too dull for young Peter, so he joined the Army and went West to fight the Indians under the command of Edmund Kirby-Smith. He was severely wounded in the thigh by an Indian arrow, but was found and removed from the field of battle in the nick of time to save his life.

He was discharged in 1860 but as soon as the War Between the

States began, he was commissioned as a cavalry officer at the age of 28. During the Civil War he saw action again in the West under Kirby-Smith. He served gallantly in this civil conflict and became a personal friend of many leading Confederates, including Kirby-Smith, Fitzhugh Lee and Jefferson Davis with whom he formed a lifelong friendship.

It was during the war that Alba became interested in Coden. After the war he acquired extensive land holdings in the Coden area, land that was originally a grant to the Rabby family. On Bayou Coden, Captain Alba developed a beautiful estate named Fairview, but more popularly called "Villa Alba".

Here he had constructed many buildings to make for gracious living, including a dance pavilion and a bath house over the Bayou. The home burned in the fall of 1927.

During this time he raised and trained horses and engaged in numerous business enterprises in Mobile, where he also maintained a home on Saint Joseph Street.

One of his chief interests was the training of horses, and it was only natural that he would be in the lively business. He also trained and sold horses, operated a funeral home and a transfer



Captain Peter F. Alba

business and served as port sexton. From these ventures, he amassed quite a fortune for that time.

Captain Alba was an expert horse trainer and he never failed in this effort, through the use of kindness, common sense and firmness. He was an ardent supporter of the movement for the humane treatment of animals. He

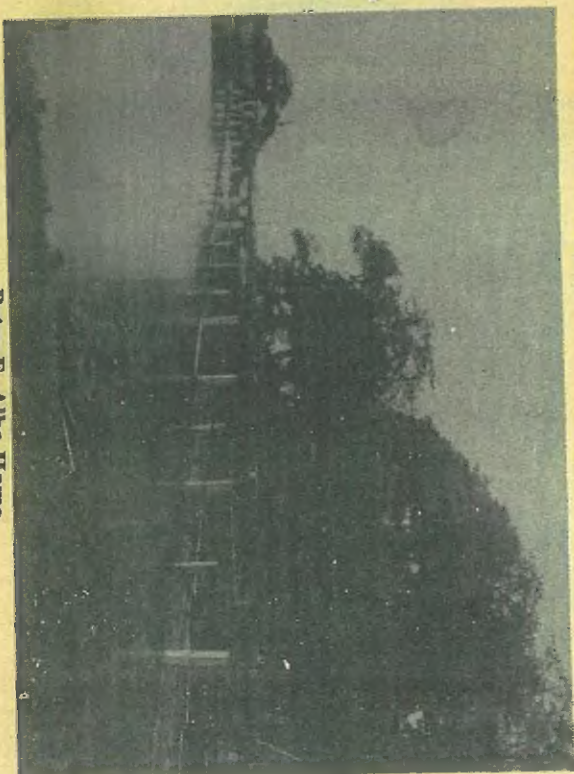
wrote numerous articles on the training of horses for publication in magazines of that day, and he was a founder of the Mobile Humane Society. He led the fight in Alabama for the abolition of check-reins. He was so incensed at their use, that on many occasions he would step up and cut the reins of an astonished rider.

His interest in good roads led to the building of the Belt Road from Coden following the coast westward and along Bayou La Batre to town.

He was an ardent advocate of education and he supported the

public schools of the time. He gave a five acre plot for the establishment of Alba School in Bayou La Batre to serve south Mobile County. At that time such a plot was considered adequate; otherwise, he would have given more acreage.

In spite of his many business interests and his personal attention to them, he, as funeral director, personally made funeral arrangements and supervised the services. He was a social leader in Mobile. His home on Saint Joseph Street was a gathering



Peter F. Alba Home